



B A U D D H A N A T H

CULTURAL PORTRAIT HANDBOOK 4



Bauddhanath

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HANUMAN DHOKA DURBAR SQUARE



PATAN DURBAR SQUARE



BHAKTAPUR DURBAR SQUARE



BAUDDHANATH



SWAYAMBHU



CULTURAL PORTRAIT HANDBOOKS

Heritage and culture can be discovered and enjoyed throughout the Kathmandu Valley. Seven monument zones in particular were recognised to be of outstanding universal value by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and have therefore been added to the List of World Heritage Sites (WHL).

The World Heritage Sites includes cultural and natural heritage sites from all over the world, and the World Heritage Convention provides a legal tool for their protection. Of the 812 World Heritage Sites, four are located in Nepal, namely the Kathmandu Valley, Sagarmatha National Park, Royal Chitwan National Park and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

The diverse monument zones of the Kathmandu Valley embody the uniquely intricate and yet refined Newari urban buildings and an incredible mix of Hindu and Buddhist culture. The Valley provides an example of mixed architectural styles and exquisite craftsmanship. Its very composition makes it one of the most complex World Heritage Sites on the WHL: not only does

it include the historic centers of valley's main cities it also encompasses remarkable living Hindu and Buddhist monuments.

The site was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1979 as it bears a unique testimony to a cultural tradition which is living (criteria iii) and is an outstanding example of a group of buildings that illustrate a significant stage in human history (criteria iv). The Valley is also the context for many living traditions and events, with artistic works of outstanding universal value (criteria vi).

This booklet is one of seven that were prepared as part of a wider awareness raising campaign aimed at focusing both local and international attention on the need to preserve the Kathmandu Valley WHS. Generous funding from the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ) has enabled the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu to prepare these publications highlighting the gems of the Valley and their rich mythological and historical background.



The giant whitewashed stupa of Baudhanath is one of the largest and most magnificent Buddhist monuments in the world. The stupa is believed to contain the relics of the mortal Buddha and is today the centre of Tibetan worship in the Kathmandu Valley. It emits a sacred energy of immense power. The majority of devotees are Tamangs, Tibetans and Newars. The stupa is said to stand at a focal point of psychic energy in the Valley of Kathmandu.

The Baudhanath stupa is known by many names:

Tibetans call it Jarung Khasor which means 'permission to do what is proper', or Khasa Chaitya because people believe that it contains the remains of the ancient Tibetan Lama Khasa. The Newars call the site Khasti Chaitya or 'Dewdrop Stupa'.



LEGENDS OF BAUDDHANATH

A Licchavi era king of Kathmandu constructed a fountain near his palace which dried up suddenly. This greatly worried the king who turned to his astrologers for help. They advised him to make a human sacrifice. A person possessing all of the thirty-two virtues was to be brought to the fountain and sacrificed. The king initiated an extensive search and asked the ministers and nobles to scour the kingdom. After the search failed to produce a suitable victim the king realized that he and his son were the only people in the kingdom who possessed all thirty-two virtues. Not wishing to be responsible for his son Manadeva's death, the king decided to give up his own life. He called Manadeva and instructed him to visit the fountain in the morning and to decapitate a hooded stranger who would be waiting for him. Manadeva did as he was asked. Blood gushed from the waterspout, the sky turned scarlet and birds crowded the sky. Manadeva did not look at the face of his victim and headed back to the palace. As he drew nearer he could sense that something was wrong: people and courtiers had gathered at the palace, women were wailing and the children were silent. Only after he had entered the palace grounds did he discover that he had unwittingly murdered his own father. The heinous crime haunted him and he decided to renounce his crown and kingdom and spend the rest of his days as a recluse.

While his inner conflicts increased, the kingdom was subjected to a dreadful drought.

When it seemed that all was lost, Manadeva had a vision in which Vajra Yogini appeared and told him to release a bird and to build a stupa wherever the creature landed. The next day the bird was released and where it landed the foundations for the stupa were laid. However, it was extremely difficult to work under the harsh, dry conditions; the labourers could not find sufficient water to mix the sand and clay and a terrible thirst had set in. When it seemed that the construction would never be completed, the labourers came upon an ingenious water collecting method. They gathered huge sheets of cloth and spread them on the ground at night to collect the dew. In the

morning they squeezed the sheets and collected the water that trickled out. The stupa was built with the dewdrops that were painstakingly collected over the years.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUPA FORM

Among all religious monuments of the world, the stupa has the longest uninterrupted historical development spanning more than three millennia. The earliest forms were burial mounds containing relics, which have been constructed from earth and rock since Neolithic times.

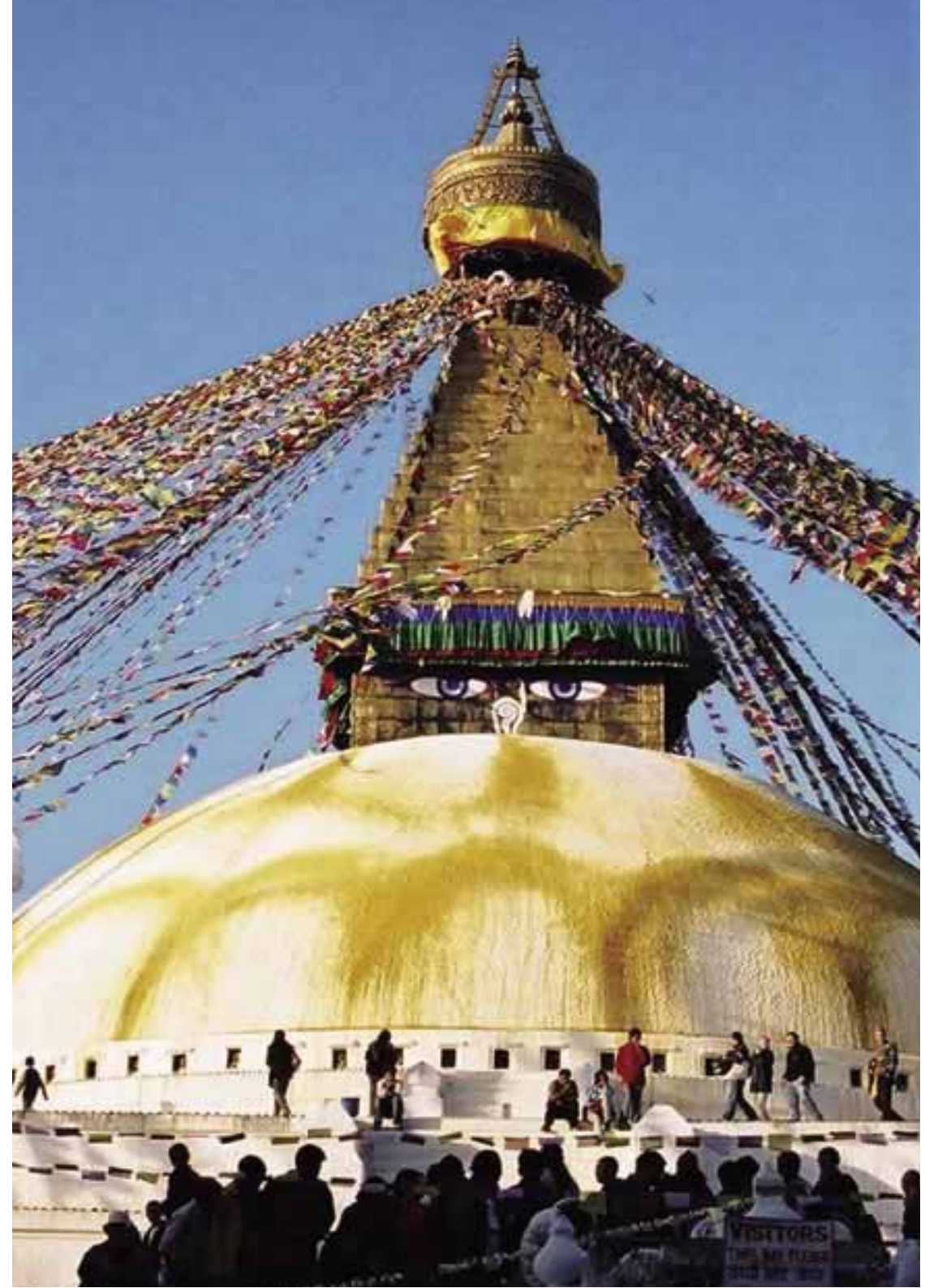
The link with Buddhism came after the death of the Buddha. A stupa was raised in his honor, and eight princes fought for his ashes and bones. These relics were eventually distributed to eight different kingdoms and stupas were erected over them. The stupa therefore enables the worshiper not only to think of the Buddha as a reality (by regarding its form as a visual manifestation of the Buddha), but also to contemplate enlightenment. Over time more and more meanings became associated with the stupa and it is now considered to symbolize the cosmos as a whole.

Fundamentally, a stupa consists of 5 parts:

- A square or Mandala shaped base
- A hemispherical dome
- A conical spire
- A crescent moon
- A disk

Each of these components is rich in metaphoric content and is identified with one of the five cosmic elements: earth, water, fire, air and space.

Over time stupa architecture traveled wherever Buddhism spread, acquiring different shapes in different countries, all modelled after the Indian prototype. The structures, however, became mainly associated with Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism. The forms found in Nepal, of which the stupas of Baudhanath and Swayambhu are the most significant examples, are especially distinct because of the eyes painted on the harmikas (see page 6).





BAUDDHANATH STUPA

The stupa of Baudhanath is one of the largest stupas in Asia and lies 6 km east of central Kathmandu, on the old trade road to Lhasa. A modern Tibetan-style gateway leads to the stupa from the south and separates the settlement from the tempestuous reality of the outside world. Once inside the area has its own characteristic, charm that is deeply imbued with religious spirit. Hundreds of people pour through the gates each day and it sometimes becomes so crowded that visitors are unintentionally swept along with the circumambulating pilgrims.

A ring of houses and commercial buildings surrounds the stupa. The lower floors have been converted into shops and the upper floors serve as residences. Curios, pashmina, Tibetan carpets, intricate thangkas (religious scroll paintings), and local





clothes with foreign labels jostle for space. However, even if the area is bustling with activity the atmosphere is invariably peaceful.

A musical version of the mantra **Om Mani Padme Hum** (see page 41) plays constantly and if it stops playing in one shop, it starts in another. A mixture of smells invades the air around the stupa, but dominant among them is the evocative smell of Tibetan juniper incense.

Pilgrims, resident lamas, tourists, people from the city, the odd craftsman, students and a group of dogs always seem to be lingering in, around and on the stupa. Some traders display their wares on sheets of cloth that are laid out on the ground. Elderly women take out their small wooden stools to bask in the sun, dry their hair, and share important gossip.

Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet, refugees have poured into Boudhanath and today it has become a predominantly Tibetan area. One can see Tibetan women wearing their meticulous braids, traditional dresses and heavy coats, circumambulating the stupa in noisy little groups. Not to be outdone, old Tibetan gentlemen with heavy turquoise earrings, pony tails, prayer beads, the ubiquitous hat and woolen boots with their trousers tucked in are seen moving around the stupa, reciting Tibetan prayers as they go.

Amidst this enchanting atmosphere, stands the colossal **Boudhanath Stupa**, commanding respect and dominating everything in its proximity. The base of the stupa is encircled by a



whitewashed wall fitted with 735 metal prayer wheels fixed into 147 chambers. Doors are built into the perimeter wall of the Boudhanath stupa in the four cardinal directions.

Two small doors on the northern side lead to the interior of the stupa. There are signs which clearly designate them 'IN' and 'OUT', but in general these directions are ignored and people enter arbitrarily.

A small room housing two huge prayer barrels stands to the left of the entrance

doors. Butter lamps flicker on a table and there are golden images of Buddha in glass cabinets. This room is so small that people are busy calculating their next step in order to avoid being bumped into. Three bells hang next to the room where the prayer barrels are kept and are rung by pilgrims as they enter the stupa.

Towards the right side of the entry point is a small pit that is dry and empty. Although it is actually the pit where limewash is prepared for maintaining the stupa (see page 19),

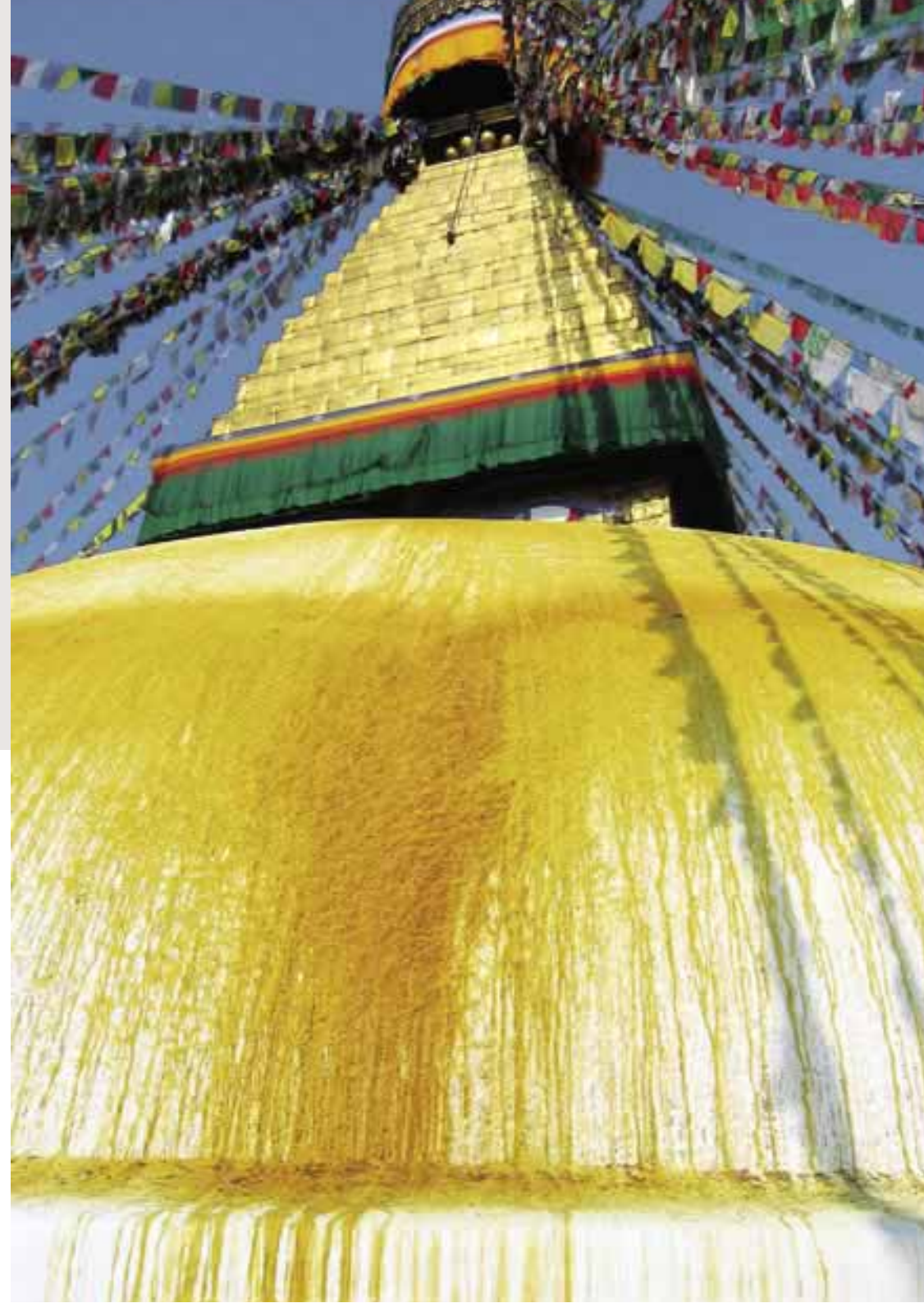
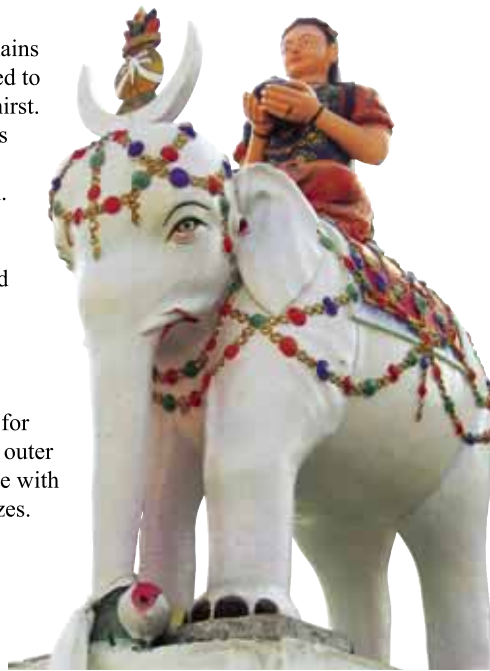
The Legend of Jadzima

Many years ago, **Avalokitesvara**, the Bodhisattva of Compassion (see page 74), promised the Buddha Amitabha that he would release all the sentient beings from their inescapable cage of misery and sorrow. He freed countless beings and thinking that he had delivered every soul from its suffering, he climbed to the top of the palace. However, once he reached the top, he looked down on the six realms and found that despite his relentless struggle he had failed in his mission. There were thousands of people whose misery seemed to increase as each day passed. The dreadful sight was so disheartening that the great Avalokitesvara wept. Two precious teardrops trickled down his face and he prayed that his tears would one day help to free some of the sentient beings from their pain. His prayers were answered and the teardrops were born as the daughters of **Indra**, the King of Heaven. He named them **Purna** and **Apurna**.

Years later, in a playful mood, Apurna stole some flowers. She thought that no one would notice but the Gods discovered her and she was punished. As retribution, she was reborn in the house of a Nepalese poultry man, Ansu. The poultry man and his wife named her **Jadzima**. When the girl grew up, she fell in love with four different men and in time, bore each of them a son. She had to raise her sons by herself as all four husbands died. Jadzima worked very hard to collect money so that she could give the children a good education. In addition she saved a small amount of money for a secret purpose. As the years passed her sons grew up to become responsible and established men and she revealed that the money she had been saving was for the construction of a magnificent stupa that would help many people to be released from their misery. With this noble thought in mind, she approached the king and asked him for his permission to build a stupa of great stature and size. The king was pleased and granted Jadzima the right to proceed. However, not everyone was happy with the king's decision. The wealthy nobles of the land told him to stop Jadzima from her construction project. They were troubled because if a lowly poultry woman could build such a great stupa, they, with their untold riches, would be expected to create something far more wonderful. The king, however, replied that he had already given the permission and the stupa would be built. The stupa was became known as Jharung Khasor or 'permission to build'.

people believe that it is the remains of the pond where **Jadzima** used to bring her ducks to slake their thirst. Unlike the Newars, the Tibetans believe that the stupa was built by Jadzima, the poultry woman. According to the Tibetan text of the legend, it was the great Padmasambhava who recounted the legend of the stupa to the illustrious King Trison Detsen.

There is path a inside the outer wall of the stupa which is used for circumambulation, just like the outer circular road. The path is replete with stupas of various shapes and sizes.





The steps on the northern side of the stupa lead to the first level of the three successive tiered **mandala**-shaped platforms that also function as circumambulatory passages. The stupa generally reflects the enlightened mind of the Buddha, and all five cosmic elements: the square base is the earth, the round dome symbolises water, the cone-shaped top is fire, the canopy is air and the volume of the whole is space.

Four small stupas are found in the corners of the first plinth. On the top of the steps that lead to the next level stand two elephants. Two warriors, a prince and a princess sit on the back of each brightly painted animal.

Tourists, students, couples, artists, photographers and residents haunt these terraces. There is a lama who sits quietly with his scripts laid out in front of him. He is an astrologer who reads people their horoscopes.

The top platform provides the base for the **dome** of the stupa, and a series of recessed niches encircle the periphery of the dome containing 108 beautiful stone sculptures of Buddhist deities. A flight of steps on the northern side leads to the first level of the tiered plinths or vimsatikona (20 corner plinths) which serve to demarcate the boundary of the sacred precinct from the secular world. The drum of the dome is plain and without embellishments. It measures over 120 feet in diameter and symbolizes the mind of the Buddha.

A legendary explanation for the great size of the Bauddhanath Stupa was that it was built after an old woman called

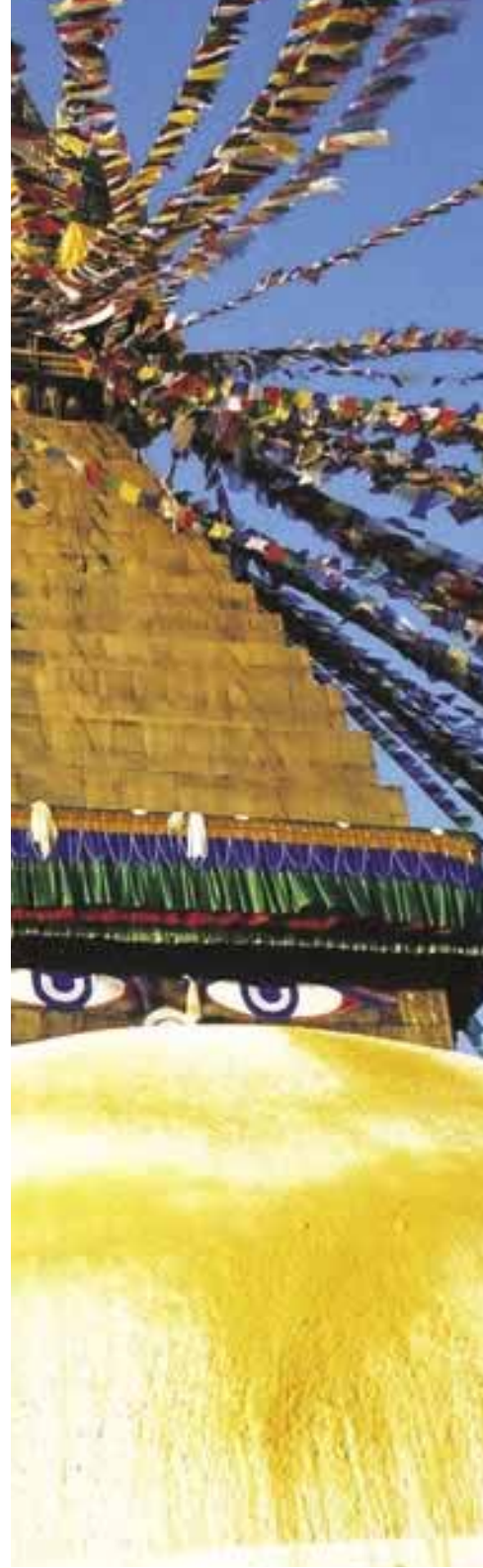
Sukhontama asked the king for enough land to build a shrine to the Buddha. The king agreed to give her only as much land as she could cover with the skin of a water buffalo. The wise old woman cut the buffalo hide into thin strips, and lying the pieces down end-to-end, formed a giant circle thus securing a generous tract of land for her pious intentions.

Above the dome is the **harmika** (4 faced pillar) and the spire. Four pairs of eyes are painted on the sides of the harmika. They are painted slightly closed, which gives the impression that they are following the pilgrims circumambulating the stupa. The real meaning of these eyes, which is the most characteristic element of the Valley's stupa architecture, remains something of an enigma. The most common explanation is that they are the all-seeing eyes of the Buddha.

Beneath the eyes there is the numeral one in Nepalese script, which looks like a nose. This symbol reminds the visitor of the monotheistic nature of the Buddhist religion.

Above the harmika towers the **spire** with steps symbolizing the thirteen levels of perfection. A multi-colored silk apron hangs around the spire, fringing the glorious eyes of the Buddha.

The spire is surmounted by a gilded lotus. It is again surmounted by a large gilded canopy containing a mandala indicating the sovereign nature of Buddha's doctrine. A silk textile is again hung around it and it is crowned with a bell shaped metal dome.



Mandala

Mandala in Sanskrit means 'circle'. The mandalas, which are onmi-present in Buddhist culture, are a very fascinating concept, referring to the cyclic concept of life.

In practice, mandala has become a generic term for any plan, chart or geometric pattern which symbolically represents the cosmos. A mandala can be used during meditation as an object for focusing attention. The symmetrical geometric shapes of mandalas draw the attention of the eyes towards their center. It is a two-dimensional representation, which through correct meditation becomes three-dimensional.

A Buddhist mandala generally depicts a central deity surrounded by a number of other deities within a landscape. Mandalas consist of an outer circular mandala and an inner square (or sometimes circular) mandala with an ornately decorated mandala palace placed at the centre. A Buddhist mandala is a 'sacred space' separated and protected from the ever-changing and impure outer world. It is thus seen as a place of Nirvana and peace.

Mandalas are often painted or sculpted in metal. Sand mandalas are patterns that are painstakingly created on the temple floor by several monks who use small bottles of coloured sand to create intricate representations from the tiny grains. The mandalas symbolize impermanence, a central teaching of Buddhism, as after the long process of creation that can take weeks, the sand is brushed into a pile and usually thrown into running water to spread the blessings of the mandala.





Maintenance of the stupa

On several occasions throughout the year, one can see local men climbing the giant dome of the stupa carrying large buckets or bundles of prayer flags. They are making sure that the Boudhanath stupa remains bright white, decorated with yellow curves and surrounded by a multitude of colourful prayer flags. In order to keep up the maintenance local families, mainly Tibetans, give donations or send their young men to help with the work.

The first step is to add a new layer of limewash to the dome. The thick slurry is prepared in a pit which can be seen on the right of the entrance stairs leading up to the stupa. Afterwards, buckets of a yellow-brown liquid are thrown over the dome, creating a pattern of decorative arcs.

On the occasion of the major festivals, such as Losar (Tibetan New Year), the series of prayer flags are replaced. At that time, you can see men climbing high up to the top of the stupa's spire to attach the new strings of flags, which will whisper their prayers into the wind throughout the new year.

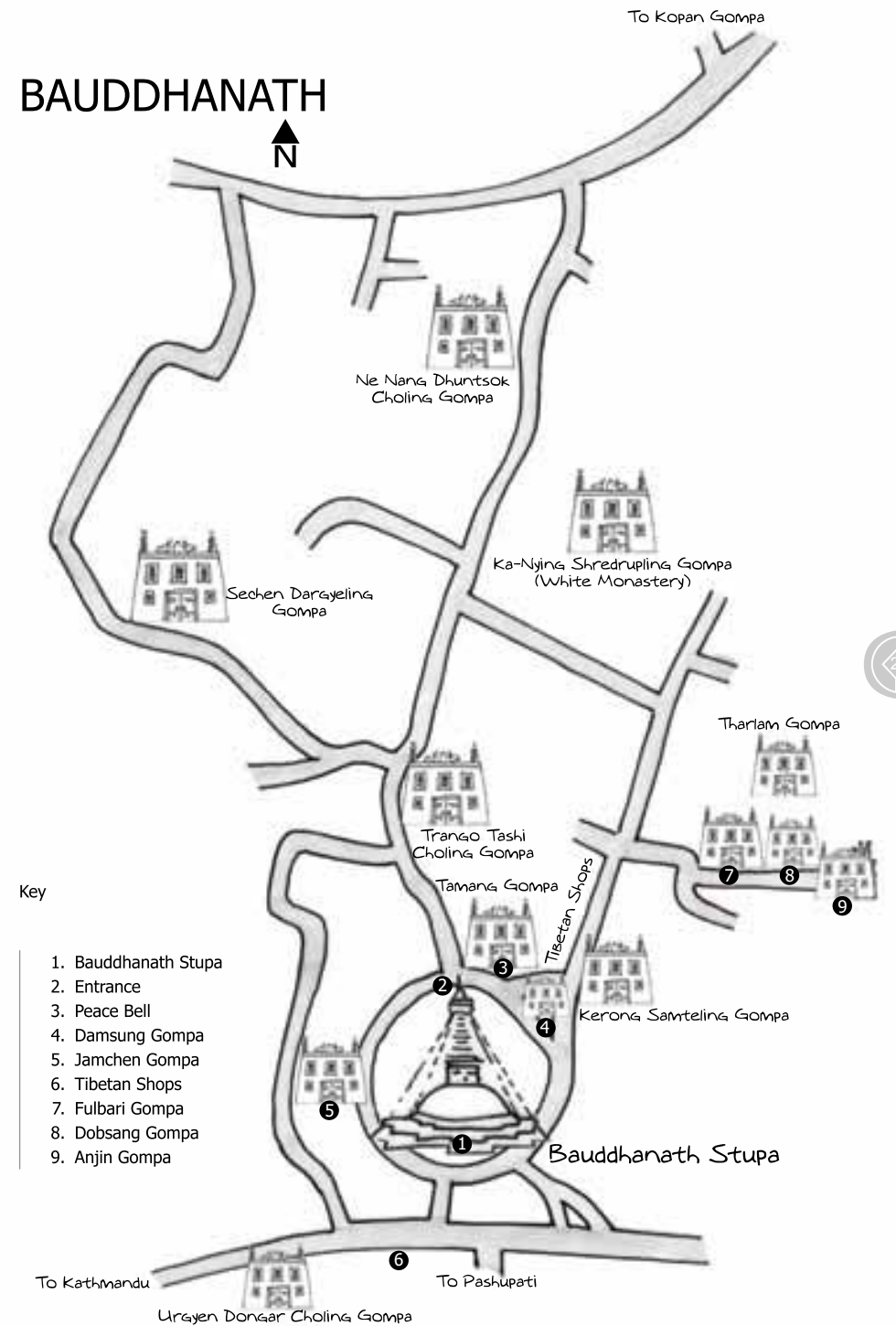
A jeweled pinnacle caps the entire structure and represents the wish-granting nature of the Enlightened thought. It is believed that the Boudhanath stupa has the power to bestow all kinds of happiness. Whoever offers prayers will be rewarded immediately and whoever offers gifts will be reborn free from thirst and sickness. There are a large amount of prayer flags attached to the the canopy, leading down along the stupa's dome. These prayer flags contain powerful mantras or prayers (see page 48).

Levels of Perfection

1. Ratnaparamita - Jewel
2. Daanparamita - giving
3. Shilaparamita - morality
4. Ksantiparamita - forbearance
5. Viryaparamita - vigour
6. Dhyanaaramita - meditation
7. Pragyaparamita - wisdom
8. Upayaparamita – skill in means
9. Pranidhiparamita - aspiration
10. Balaparamita - strength
11. Vajraparamita – diamond and action
12. Gyanaparamita – knowledge
13. Nirvana



BAUDDHANATH



HARATI TEMPLE

A separate temple lies to the north of the main entrance. The local Newar community dedicated it to the Goddess Harati. It is built in a rectangular plan, surmounted with a metallic roof. The temple houses a silver sculpture of the Goddess, shown with a small figure of a baby on her breast.

According to a Tibetan legend, the image inside the temple represents Jazima, who built the stupa with the help of her four sons (see page 13).



Harati Temple

Harati Ma

Sometimes referred to as 'Ajima' or Abhirati, and worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike, Harati Ma is considered a protector against disease, especially small pox, and other evil spirits. Abhirati gave birth to five hundred children. She was particularly fond of the youngest son. Unfortunately, Abhirati had a habit of eating children, which earned her the name of 'Harati', or 'Stealer of Children'. She did not eat her own offspring but grew very fond of the children of the settlement of Rajagriha. As time passed the children of Rajagriha disappeared at an ever faster rate and the people were overwrought. They approached Buddha and requested him to end their misery. Buddha decided to kidnap Abhirati's favourite son in order to teach her a lesson. The day that Abhirati returned home and could not find him, she grew deeply concerned and searched the globe. Finally the Stealer of Children approached Buddha and asked for her favourite son to be returned. Buddha asked her why she was concerned when only one of her children was missing. Abhirati realized her mistakes and promised never again to eat human flesh.

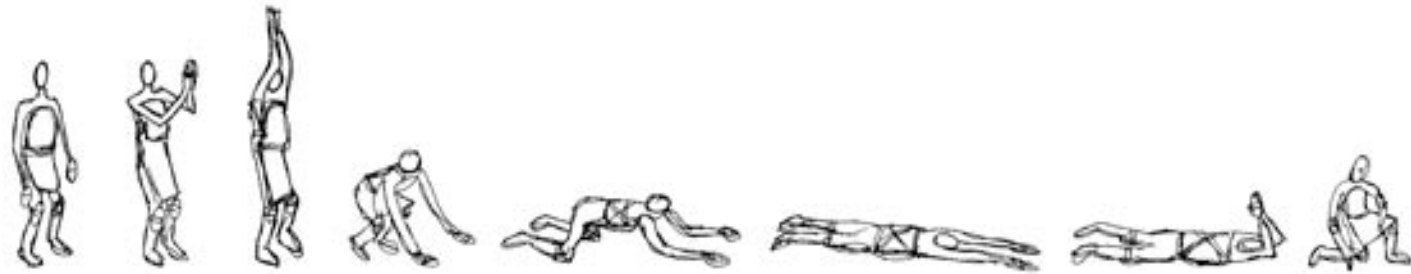
The people of Nepal worship Harati Ma and ask her to protect their children from disease. In sculptured images 5 children always accompany Harati Ma. They represent her original five hundred offspring and, despite her child-eating past, she has become a symbol of Motherhood.



Harati Temple



PILGRIMAGE



Pilgrimage is practised throughout the world, and plays a part in all major religions. In the Tibetan world pilgrimage has also gained particular importance. This may be linked to the fact that Tibetans used to be nomadic people for whom traveling was a way of life. Additionally, the omnipresent Himalayan landscape, throughout which the people traveled every day, demanded visits to sacred places en route in order to attain merit and good luck.

The motivations for pilgrimage are diverse, but for most

Tibetans it is linked to gaining merit and to ensuring good luck for the future. People go on pilgrimage to ask for a better rebirth, cure for an illness or to thank the Buddha or Bodhisattvas for a wish that has been granted. In the Buddhist context it is also common to ask for things for others in order to restrain from egoism.

There are many sacred pilgrimage places for Tibetan Buddhists and Bauddhanath has become one of them. Every day, pilgrims and locals can be seen circumambulating the stupa and turning the prayer wheels. Pilgrimage, however, is believed to be more auspicious during certain months of the year.

Pilgrimage is not just a matter of walking to a place and then returning home. There are many activities included to improve the focus of the pilgrim.

Circumambulation is the main activity for a pilgrim. Circuits of 3, 13 or 108 are particularly auspicious with sunset and sunrise being considered the most auspicious times for such activities.

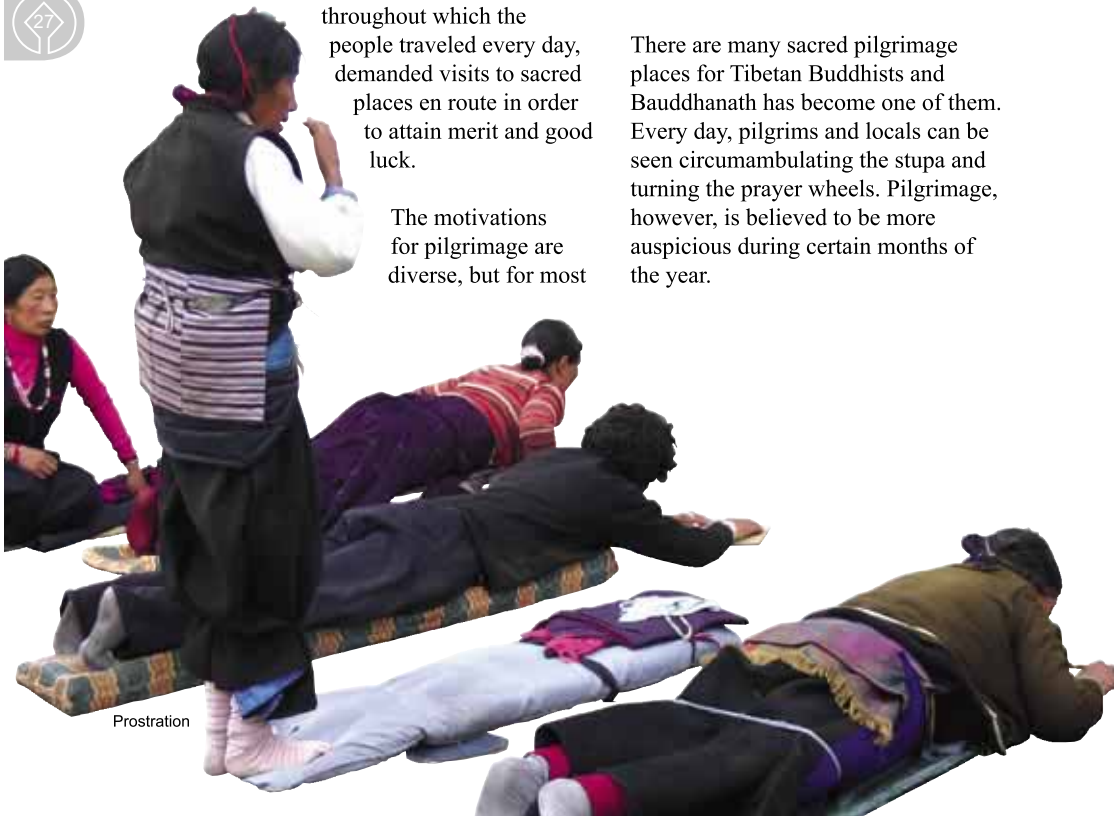
Another of the activities is **prostration** or Chaktsal in Tibetan. Along the circumambulatory path around the stupa (especially at the inner side of the wall), there are wooden boards for use in the prostration process.

In Buddhism, the traditional gesture of reverence is to place the palms of both hands together and raise them high in front, usually up to the level of the forehead. In order to express deep veneration, a Buddhist may bow or prostrate before the image of the Buddha, members of the Sangha or important lamas. When a Buddhist prostrates before an image, he acknowledges the fact that the Buddha attained the perfect and supreme

Enlightenment. Such an act helps the Buddhist to overcome egoistic feelings so that he may become more ready to listen to the Teaching of the Buddha.

The process is simple but very tiring: They place the hands in “namaste” position and touch forehead, throat and heart. Then they kneel in a half prostration pose and then stretch out their hands until lying full on the ground. Then they rise and repeat the whole process again and again. Prostration is a tool of mediation and a gesture to proclaim the existence of a state of being vastly greater than the self. The really devout carry out entire pilgrimages like this, advancing forward the length of their body after each prostration.

During the pilgrimage, it is also a habit to leave donations. **Khatas**, white ceremonial scarfs (see page 44), are given to lamas, travelers and are left around statues as a token of respect. Other offerings include (yak)butter, and money.



Prostration



MONASTERIES OF BAUDDHANATH

Since Nepal first opened its doors to visitors in the 1950's, thousands of foreigners have flocked to the monasteries, or gompas, of the Kathmandu Valley to study Buddhism. Today, there are more schools than ever, many now home to Westerners who began as students and have never left. There has been no shortage of masters and teachers, as many fled to Nepal from Tibet after the Chinese invasion in the 1950's.

Prior to this time the Bauddhanath Stupa was surrounded by a simple Tamang village and farmland. Only the Chini Lama Lhakhang, which forms part of the terrace of buildings to the north of the stupa, was constructed before the influx of Tibetans.

Long ago Bauddhanath's Chini Lama had a vision of the stupa being surrounded by a thousand monasteries. Today, his vision is slowly becoming reality as more than two dozen new

monasteries have been constructed since the 1970's. Surprisingly, and in contrast with the rest of the Tibetan world, most monasteries around Bauddhanath belong to the old Nyingmapa order.

Although most structures are relatively new, it is well worth exploring the streets of Bauddhanath and visiting some of the monasteries. Follow the chanting monks and you may find yourself being invited to attend a prayer service in one of the gompas. No other place outside Tibet has as many Tibetan monasteries in such a concentrated area and surrounding the stupa you can find gompas representing all the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

Today a number of Bauddhanath monasteries offer Tibetan Buddhism classes and visitors can take everything from a seven-day course to a degree in Buddhism. Initially many western visitors were on the 'Hippy Trail'.



Sechen Dargyeling
Monastery



Monastic schools

Tibetan Buddhism is also called Lamaism, after the monks or lamas. This indicates the important place of the monastic world in the religious concept. Today, there are four major orders in Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa, each with a number of sub-sects:

NYINGMAPA

The **Nyingmapa order** is considered the Old School of Tibetan Buddhism and its origins can be traced back to Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava, the Indian Saint who introduced Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th and 9th centuries. In contrast to the other major sects, Nyingmapa never reached a major centralized power, and the order prospered mostly in rural villages, where it became strongly linked with older shamanistic traditions.

KAGYUPA

During the resurgence of Buddhist influence in 11th century Tibet, many scholars from the Nyingmapa order went to study in India, which had a revitalising effect for the Nyingmapa order itself, but which also resulted in the creation of a number of sub-sects. One of these scholars was the famous poet Milarepa (1040-1123), a disciple of Marpa (1012-1093), who became the founder of the main Nyingmapa sub-sect: the **Kagyupa order**. Although much more mainstream, the original shamanistic background did not completely disappear and Kagyupa monasteries became important centres for synthesising the clerical and shamanistic orientations of Tibetan Buddhism.

SAKYAPA

With the uprising of Buddhism in Tibet in the 11th century, many Indian Buddhist texts were brought to Tibet and monasteries started focussing on the study and translation of these scriptures. One of

the leading figures was Kunga Gyaltsen (1182-1251), also known as Sakya Pandita, the scholar from Sakya and the new movement resulted in the creation of the **Sakyapa order**.

Because of the high level scholastic tradition of these monasteries, Kunga Gyaltsen, as well as the abbots who came after him, were considered as incarnations of Manjushri or Jampa, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. During the 13th and 14th centuries the Sakyapa order was closely linked with the Chinese Mongols and with their support the Sakyapa rulers became rulers of the Tibetan kingdom. This made the Sakyapa order very powerful and Sakyapa monasteries were constructed throughout the kingdom.

There are several sub-schools, among which the **Ngorpa** and the **Tsarpa school** are the main ones.

GELUGPA

The virtuous school or the **Gelugpa order** of Tibetan Buddhism, also called the yellow hats, is the youngest of the three major schools and was founded in the late 14th century by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). Tsongkhapa studied at all the major schools of his time, including the much older Kadampa school. There he studied the Bengali teachings of the Indian sage Atisha, which were a combination of Mahayana Buddhism and tantric practices. After a vision of Atisha, Tsongkhapa developed a new doctrine which advocates doctrinal purity and monastic discipline as prerequisites to advanced tantric studies.

Over time, the Gelugpa order grew into the largest and most influential order in the Tibetan world. Gradually it became more and more associated with political power, as it was the main order to deliver the Dalai Lamas.

These days the Buddhist centers of Bauddhanath attract a wide range of interested people from students traveling after college to highly powered business men and women looking for a way to regain an element of spiritualism in their lives.

Some of the more influential monasteries around Bauddhanath are:

Sechen Monastery

The Sechen Dargyeling Monastery is one of the largest monasteries in the Bauddhanath area. It belongs to the Nyingmapa order and is also known as the Bhutanese Monastery. When the founding Rinpoche left Tibet he received donations from the Bhutanese Royal family in order to build Sechen. Construction work began in the 1980's and took 12 years to

complete. The walls of the Monastery contain frescos representing all four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism and the monastery is an entirely recent construction in Tibeto-Bhutanese style. It is open to visitors and it is pleasant to walk between the different monastic buildings and in the gardens.

The monastery houses an important school for **Thangka painting** (see page 54). The school was founded in 1996 by the Sechen Rinpoche and is today the only monastic thangka school in Nepal. It gives training courses to monks, emphasising the meditative, educational and artistic values of the art.

Besides the thangka school, Sechen also houses an important school for traditional Tibetan medicine, as well as a guesthouse and restaurant, open to visitors.

White Monastery

Also known as Ka-Nying, this Kagyupa monastery is a popular place to study in Bauddhanath.

In the main temple hall, there are large statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, Padmasambhava and Vajrasatva. A stupa in the right corner contains bones of Tulku Urgen Rinpoche. The walls of the monastery are decorated with good frescoes.

Today there are some 150 monks living at the monastery which is known for its higher Tibetan Buddhism studies. The International Center for Higher Buddhist Studies and Tibetan Language of the monastery is now affiliated with Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu.



Kopan Monastery

Jamchen Monastery

The Jamchen monastery is one of the only monasteries within the circle of buildings surrounding the Bauddhanath stupa.

This monastery belongs to the Sakyapa school and is also called the Mustang monastery, as its foundation was funded by the Mustang Raja (king of Mustang). The Jamchen Monastery is often visited by the Raja of Mustang and other Mustangi, especially when they come south for the harsh winter months.

The monastery was built in 1982 on land donated by a niece of the late Chini Lama. For the construction, the

original house was demolished to make space for the new monastery, which houses a three storey of Jampa or the Maitreya (Future Buddha) statue.

The grand inauguration ceremony in 1986 was attended by the late king Birendra of Nepal and honored by a surprise visit by Jimmy Carter, former president of the United States.



Gelugpa Monasteries

The best known Gelugpa Monastery in Baudhdhanath is situated north-east of the stupa. The Kerong Samteling Gumpa is one of the oldest in the area having been established in 1951 by a Mongolian Lama (Sokpo Lama).

As Gelugpa is the sect of Tibetan Buddhism to which the Dalai Lama belongs, his photo is prominently displayed. There are also statues of Tshongkhapa (founder of the Gelugpa order) and his disciples at the altar and fresco paintings depicting the life of the Buddha that were painted when the monastery was renovated in 1996.

Kopan Monastery

Just north of Baudhdhanath is the Kopan hill, rising out of the terraced rice fields. The Kopan hill was once home to the astrologer to the king of Nepal, and is today the scene for one of the Valley's largest monasteries.

Kopan Monastery was founded in 1971. Today Kopan is thriving with 360 monks, mainly from Nepal and Tibet, and is a spiritual oasis for hundreds of visitors yearly from around the world. Kopan Monastery teaches the Gelugpa branch of Tibetan Buddhism. It was the first to start offering foreigners meetings with Tibetan Buddhist lamas in the 1960's. Some come for a one-week basic course; others for longer periods of study and a few stay and become monks and nuns.

Monks and nuns from the age of seven come from all over Nepal and the other Himalayan countries to attend this Gelugpa monastery, one of the most

renowned in the Kathmandu Valley, to receive a classical monastic education. The students receive extensive training in traditional philosophical subjects and debating. Additionally the monks and nuns assemble twice a day for prayers dedicated to the well-being and happiness of all sentient beings.

A newly established Tantric college houses about 60 monks studying tantric rituals such as the making of sand mandalas, butter sculptures, arranging initiations and prayer ceremonies.





PRAYER WHEELS AND OM MANI PADME HUM

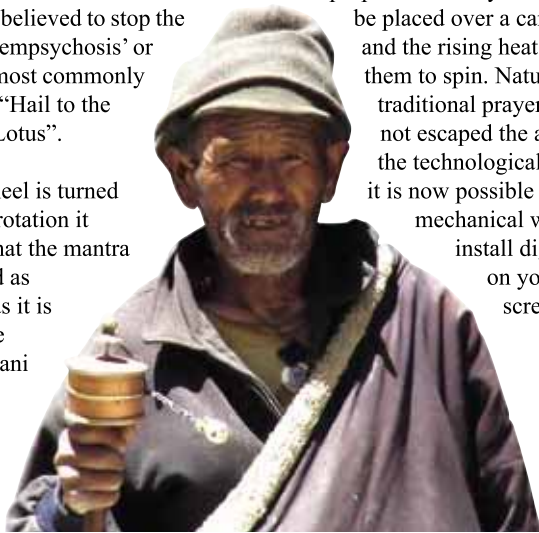
The six syllabled mystic sentence Om Mani Padme Hum is the mantra of Avalokitesvara (Chenrezig in Tibetan) and is revolved inside prayer wheels or Mani. The wheels are devices for spreading spiritual blessings and well being. The mantra is printed as many times as possible on the amount of rice paper that fills the inside of the wheel. The paper is wound round an axle and sealed into the protective cylinder. In some of the larger prayer wheels it is printed over a million times. In the more decorative wheels the mantra is often also carved on the outside.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that saying this mantra out loud or silently to oneself invokes the powerful benevolent attention and blessings of Avalokitesvara, the embodiment of compassion. The mere utterance of the mantra is believed to stop the cycle of 'metempsychosis' or rebirth. It is most commonly translated as "Hail to the jewel in the Lotus".

When the wheel is turned through one rotation it symbolises that the mantra has been read as many times as it is written inside the wheel. Mani

wheels are always spun clockwise. This matches the required direction of circumambulation and follows the direction of the sun. Interestingly, practitioners of Bon, the pre-Buddhist spiritual tradition of Tibet, spin their prayer wheels counter-clockwise, the same direction they use in circumambulation.

There are a number of prayer wheel types, the most common being the hand-held version usually with a wooden handle, that is used on pilgrimages and during private prayer. Slightly larger wheels are mounted in rows leading to shrines or on well-trodden paths used to circumambulate sacred areas such as around the stupas at Swayambhu and Bauddhanath. The wheels can also be placed in strategic positions so that wind, or water, will propel them. Very small wheels can be placed over a candle flame and the rising heat will cause them to spin. Naturally the traditional prayer wheels have not escaped the advances of the technological world and it is now possible to purchase mechanical wheels or to install digital versions on your computer screen.





KHATA: CEREMONIAL SCARF

Offering a khata or a ceremonial scarf is in practice in many parts of the Himalayan world and other regions where Tibetans have settled. Offering a khata is an auspicious symbol and it lends a positive note to the start of any enterprise or relationship and indicates the good intentions of the person offering it. Khatas are generally offered to religious images, such as statues of the Buddha, and to lamas and high ranking officials, but they are often also given to anyone who is about to undertake an important journey.

The khata is made of pure silk, raw silk or cotton. The width varies and so does the length. Depending upon the importance and status of the person to whom it is offered or the occasion on which it is offered, larger and more expensive khatas are presented.

It is widely believed that the practice of giving of khatas evolved during the reign of the Tibetan king Songstan Gambo in the 7th century. During this time a large number Chinese

merchants and high officials paid tribute to the king with precious offerings including turquoise, jade, coral and silk clothes. At that time the precious silk cloth was transported from China along the famous silk route to the rest of the world.

The glamour and availability of silk slowly replaced the practice of offering jewels and precious stones to the king and nobility.



The offering of a piece of silk to royalty became accepted protocol. With the passing of time Tibetans started offering silken garments to their family members, distinguished people and celebrities. Silk, though plentiful, was expensive so people started cutting long silken pieces to shorter ones.

The original khata is milk white in colour to symbolize purity of body, mind and spirit. As Buddhism took root in Tibet, great Buddhist monks like Shantarakshita, Padmasambhava and Atisha visited the country wearing yellow robes. The system of offering yellow katas was introduced as yellow signifies calmness and serenity. The Mongols introduced the blue khata known as the So-tag. Blue signifies the colour of the seas as well as protection from evil forces.

A memory that any visitor to the high mountain passes of Nepal will not forget is the sight of hundreds of khatas streaming from makeshift flag poles on the crest of hilltops. When safe passage out of a village and to the upper reaches of the hills has been achieved, and as a prayer for continued safety, khatas are tied at the highest point.



PRAYER FLAGS

Prayer flags are commonly known as Dar Cho in Tibet (Dar meaning to increase in life, fortune, health and wealth, and Cho meaning all sentient beings). A second name is Lungta, which in Tibetan literally means 'Horses of the Winds' and relates to their flapping movements and ability to carry the luck of individuals on their backs, travel through the air and scatter it in all directions. The original Lungta flag has an image of a horse carrying a jewel. This represents one of the mythical Pancha Buddhas named Ratnasmabhava or the 'Jewel born one' with the horse as his mount.



Prayer flags can be traced back to the ancient **Bön** religion where shamanistic priests used simple colored flags in healing ceremonies.

The flags used to be produced using wood-blocks, which were printed onto unglazed country paper, which is tough and enduring. These days the flags are usually machine printed onto cotton or synthetic cloth.

They come in sets ordered in blue, white, red, green and yellow symbolizing the five elements: space, water, fire, air and earth. The colours are also said to represent the **Pancha Buddhas** (see page 74), which are typical for the Kathmandu Valley: Blue represents Akshobhya; Yellow is Ratnasambhava; Red is Amitbha and finally green is the colour of Amoghasiddhi.

Each corner of the flag contains a different protective animal: the Garuda (man-bird creature) is in the top left. A dragon appears in the top right, a tiger in the bottom left and a lion in the bottom right. The strings should be hung horizontally or from a central point, as at Bauddhanath.

Another form of prayer flag is the vertical banner, usually in white, which is attached to a wooden pole.

Monasteries and houses frequently have tall poles protruding from the roofs with numerous strings of flags attached. They are renewed annually on the 3rd day after Losar or Tibetan New Year. The flags commonly have mystic mantras of the three Bodhisattvas: Manjushri, Avalokitesvara and

Vajrapani, and of Tara, the female Bodhisattva responsible for the safety of travelers on the road.

There are a number of shops selling prayer flags and other dharma items in the rows of commercial premises facing the stupa at Bauddhanath, as well as in the shops on the road outside the main complex. The walls are piled high with rainbow arrays of flags, musical instruments and Tibetan texts. If you do buy any of these items to take home remember that they are sacred objects and should be treated with respect.



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THANGKA

Thangkas are meticulously painted or embroidered religious scrolls placed on textile mounts (usually silk brocades). They are hung in monasteries or in family shrines and play an important role in ceremonial events and processions. In Tibetan the word Than means flat and Ka means painting. Much like the Illuminated Manuscripts of the European monastic orders, Thangkas were used by Buddhist monks in medieval Tibet to spread their teachings and for educational purposes. The holy men would travel to remote regions to disseminate the Teachings or Dharma and

it was necessary for them to carry educational aids. As the monks were largely peripatetic, they needed something that was light and could easily be rolled up and strapped to their packs. Thangkas could be carried without any difficulty and their finely detailed renditions of sacred scenes played an important role in disseminating the Teachings of Buddha.



The introduction of thangkas in Tibet can be traced back to the reign of king Songstan Gambo in the 7th century. As the religion grew, so did the demand for religious icons and Buddhist manuscripts. Songstan Gambo sent scholars to different parts of Nepal and India to bring manuscripts and icons to Tibet. During that time certain techniques and painting schools of western India were very influential and their techniques gradually spread over the whole of India, reached Nepal and finally made their way in Tibet.

A number of manuscripts were copied in the Kathmandu Valley in the 10th century for distribution to new Tibetan monasteries. For example, a facsimile of the Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita was made in Patan in 999 AD for the Sakya monastery in Tibet and a copy of Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita was made in Nepal in the year 1069 AD for the Ngor monastery in Tibet. Thus the influence of Nepalese artists permeated the religious communities of Tibet and into China during this period.

The physical design of a thangka is essentially geometric, with all the pictorial elements laid out on a systematic grid of angles and intersecting lines. A skilled thangka artist will generally select from a catalogue of predetermined compositions and elements, to compile an overall image that transmits the required teaching or message.

The entire process demands great mastery of drawing and perfect understanding of the symbolism of the scene in order to capture its spirit. In a gompa thangkas are used as a focal

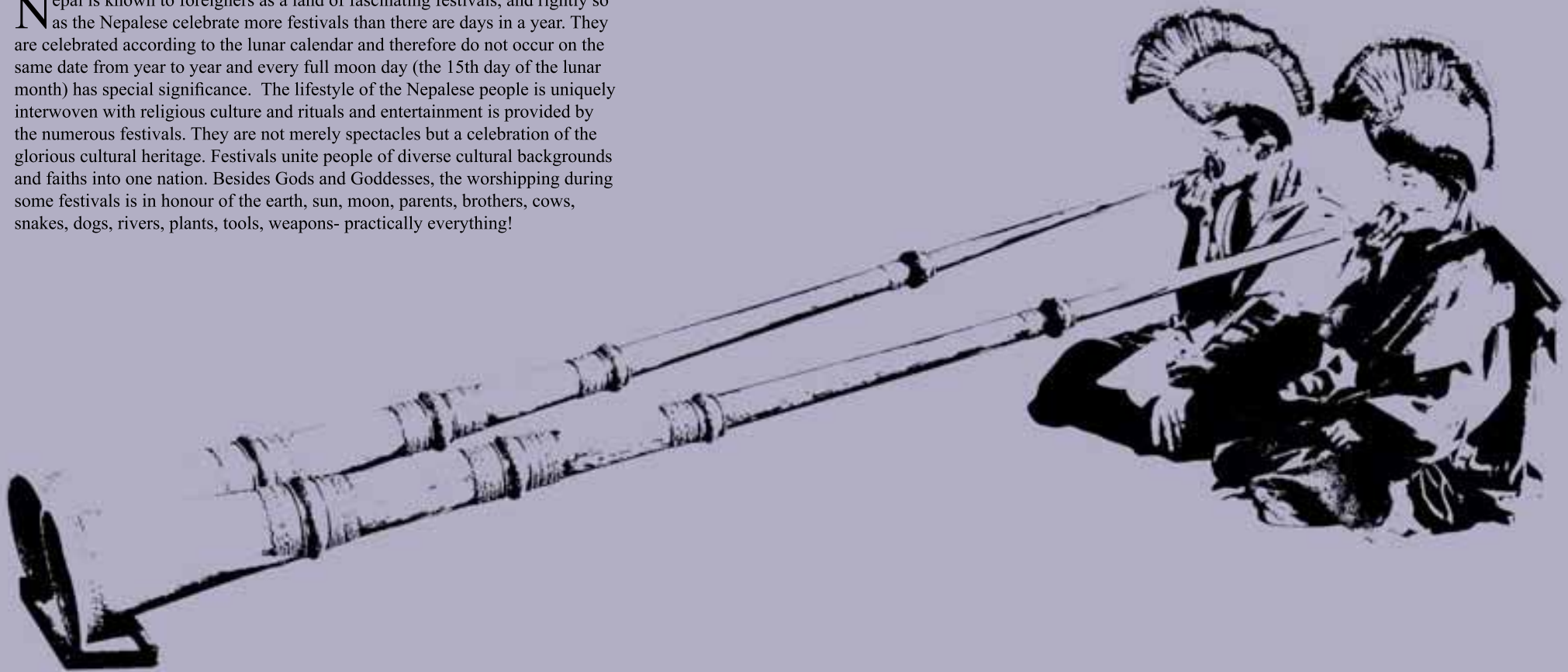
point of worship and meditation. They serve as a guide for contemplation. For example, a teacher might instruct a student to imagine himself as a specific figure in the painting. The thangka can then be used as a reference for the details of posture, attitude, colour, clothing etc. The paintings convey iconographic information in a pictorial manner, which is further supported by texts that discuss the same meditation in written form.

A thangka is not only about the image and the scroll but also the textile mountings. Some thangkas are constructed of a woven or embroidered central image, but these are much less common than the painted versions. Thangka artists first prepare a canvas and dip it in glue or slaked lime. Then the canvas or cloth is stretched and tied to a wooden or a bamboo frame. Once the canvas is properly stretched and dried, a special paste of gum and slaked lime or white mud is mixed and carefully applied. A bottle or a stone with a smooth surface is used to apply the paste in order to even out the rough edges of the canvas. Once it has dried, an outline or sketch is made in charcoal and eventually colour is added with a fine brush. Once the painting is complete, the canvas is taken to a tailor for the textile mountings. Silk brocades are preferred to other materials.

FESTIVALS

by Shanti Mishra

Nepal is known to foreigners as a land of fascinating festivals, and rightly so as the Nepalese celebrate more festivals than there are days in a year. They are celebrated according to the lunar calendar and therefore do not occur on the same date from year to year and every full moon day (the 15th day of the lunar month) has special significance. The lifestyle of the Nepalese people is uniquely interwoven with religious culture and rituals and entertainment is provided by the numerous festivals. They are not merely spectacles but a celebration of the glorious cultural heritage. Festivals unite people of diverse cultural backgrounds and faiths into one nation. Besides Gods and Goddesses, the worshipping during some festivals is in honour of the earth, sun, moon, parents, brothers, cows, snakes, dogs, rivers, plants, tools, weapons- practically everything!





Some festivals such as Dasain and Tihar are celebrated throughout the country. Some are celebrated only in the cities. These include Indra Jatra in Kathmandu, Rato Machhendranath Jatra in Patan and Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur. Some are celebrated only in one village; Hari Shankar Jatra in Pharping, Adinath Jatra in Chobhar and Maha-Laxmi Jatra in Thankot. The festivals which are centered on Bauddhanath are as following:

Name	Month of Celebration
Buddha Jayanti	Baisakh (Apr/May)
Gonai Jatra	Sawan (Jul/Aug)
Mamla Jatra	Magha (Jan/Feb)
Lhosar	Falgun (Feb/Mar)
Timal Jatra	Chaitra (Mar/Apr)
Bya-lo:	12 yearly festival

Buddha Jayanti (Baisakh/April-May)

Buddha Jayanti is celebrated on the full moon of Baisakh to commemorate three major events in Buddha's life - his birth, enlightenment and passing into Nirvana. On this day, the Bauddhanath Stupa is decorated with prayer flags. Crowds of Tibetans, Tamangs and Sherpas flock together for the celebration and merry making. At about 4 p.m., people gather at

Bauddhanath to see the festive parade led by an elephant carrying a beautiful image of Buddha. It goes around Bauddhanath and marches through the streets to another stupa at Chabahil, built by Charumati, daughter of the Indian Emperor Ashoka. The Tibetan and Sherpa women wear fabulous coral and turquoise ornaments. At night, thousands of candles and butter lamps are lit to celebrate the auspicious occasion in honour of Lord Buddha



who left his palace to bring to the world teachings of great compassion.

Gonai Jatra (Sawan/July-August)

This festival is celebrated by the entire Tamang community a day after the Gai Jatra festival of Kathmandu and Patan. It has a carnival-type atmosphere with dancing, singing and comedy—anything that causes mirth and laughter are its highlights. The households whose family members have died in the preceding year send two boys — one dressed as a yogi and another as a God — to parade through the main thoroughfares of the Bauddhanath.

Mamla Jatra (Magha/January-February)

The full moon day of Magha is important for young Tamang and Tibetan men. On this day, they take great interest in celebrating the festival in honour of the goddess Dakini Ma Ajima (Mamla). They carry Ajima in her well-decorated palanquin to visit the houses of her devotees around Bauddhanath, along the main road in the east and the path to Pashupati in the west which marks the extent of the Chini Lama's historical domain. On the same day, the Newars living in the vicinity of the stupa congregate to celebrate.



They worship and offer food to Ajima inviting relatives to join the joyous feasting.

Losar
(Falgun/February-March)

This festival is celebrated by the Tibetan and Sherpa people to welcome their New Year or 'Losar'. It is observed every year on the Parewa day of Fagu Purnima (full moon). It begins with nine days of religious and social activities such as the distribution of blessings from senior family members, exchange of visits, the wearing of new clothes and preparation of delicacies in the hope of having bright days ahead. The tradition is to observe Losar at

one's own home so it also marks the end of any journeys. On this day, every Sherpa is in a festive mood. Visitors are offered Chhang (barley beer), their famous drink. Folk songs and dances are organized to celebrate the New Year. Losar ceremonies are observed in different places such as Bauddhanath and Swayambhu.

Timal Jatra
(Chairta - March/April)

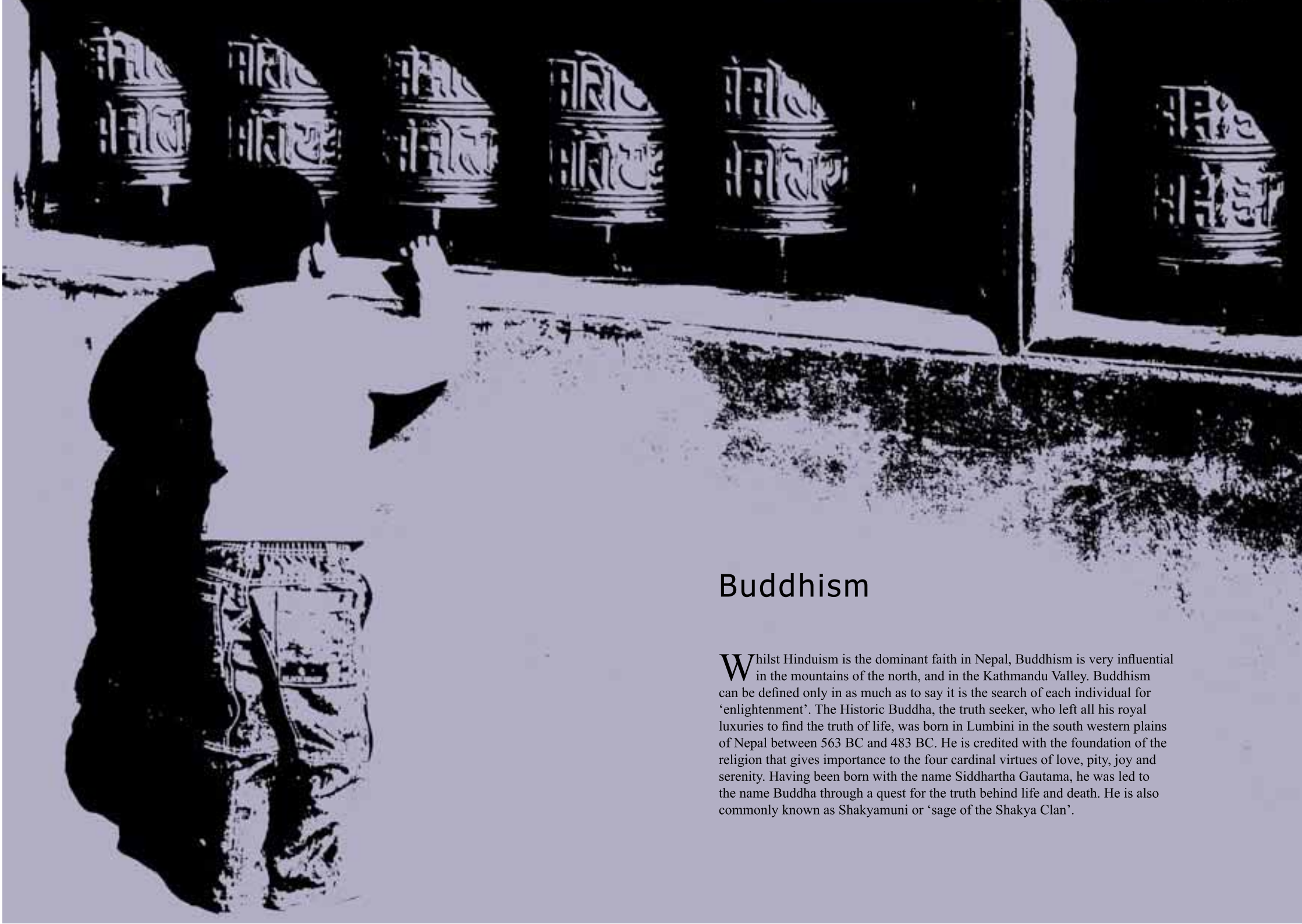
Timal Jatra is observed on the night before the Chairta Purnima (full moon). Thousands of devotees from villages in the hilly regions and the Kathmandu Valley come to Bauddhanath to celebrate throughout the night by praying, singing and dancing. Before dawn, they leave for Balaju in the north western part of Kathmandu to have a holy bath under the 22 dragon-headed water spouts and pay homage to the image of the sleeping Narayan deity. After the sacred bath and puja, they also climb the nearby Jamacha hill to worship the Buddhist Stupa and make a pilgrimage to Swayambhu.

Bya-la: Twelve yearly Festival

Bya-la is the biggest Tibetan festival and is held in Bauddhanath every twelve years on the first full moon of the year of the bird (i.e. 1981, 1993, and 2005). It is celebrated by the high mountain Tibetan Buddhists of Himalayan regions in winter and spring. The smiling pilgrims congregate around the great stupa, offering prayers with butter lamps. Beautiful Dharma articles – water bowls, vases, tea cups and other Tibetan items are displayed by Newar Buddhists and merchants. Himalayan pilgrims also bring attractive wooden cups, corals, jades and turquoise for sale to meet the cost of their pilgrimage. They believe that on the auspicious occasion Lord Buddha's rays are spread all over the valley.







Buddhism

Whilst Hinduism is the dominant faith in Nepal, Buddhism is very influential in the mountains of the north, and in the Kathmandu Valley. Buddhism can be defined only in as much as to say it is the search of each individual for 'enlightenment'. The Historic Buddha, the truth seeker, who left all his royal luxuries to find the truth of life, was born in Lumbini in the south western plains of Nepal between 563 BC and 483 BC. He is credited with the foundation of the religion that gives importance to the four cardinal virtues of love, pity, joy and serenity. Having been born with the name Siddhartha Gautama, he was led to the name Buddha through a quest for the truth behind life and death. He is also commonly known as Shakyamuni or 'sage of the Shakya Clan'.



Buddhism is based on the Teachings (**Dharma**) of the Buddha.

The historic Buddha, **Siddhartha Gautama** was born in **Lumbini**, southern Nepal around 500 BC. He was born as a prince and later left the royal life in search of enlightenment. In this way he discovered the so-called “middle path” or method of moderation to reach **nirvana** or heaven.

The basic belief is that life on earth is only a path towards the perfection of the self. In order to reach enlightenment and thus nirvana, Buddhism preaches the liberating force created through the cooperation of body and mind (practices related to meditation). The ultimate goal is to reach complete **detachment**.

Buddhists have a cyclic concept of time, which includes the belief in **reincarnation**. One has to go through a series of rebirths until nirvana is reached, where one is free from desire and suffering. The path that takes you through the different lives and rebirths is referred to as **karma**. Karma is not a fatalistic principle, but it refers to the actions which one undertakes during a lifetime and which will be reflected in the next life.

Siddhartha Gautama is referred to as the “**Historic Buddha**” or the Present Buddha as there is also a **Past Buddha** and a **Future Buddha**. The latter is also referred to as Maitreya or Jampa. It is believed that he will come to earth in about 1000 years from now, once the dharma has reached a very low level and people require guidance.





The historic Buddha himself never wrote down his principles. All of this was done by later generations, leading to numerous discussions among his followers on the exact interpretations of the teaching. This debate resulted in the creation of two major schools of Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada.

Theravada, or the ‘Doctrine of the Elders’, is also referred to as Hinayana. This is the strictest, most conservative and most scholastic form of Buddhism, which adheres very closely to the original teachings. It is believed that the search for nirvana is an individual pursuit. This is the form of Buddhism found in South-East Asia.

Mahayana took Buddhism in a new direction, which was less strict and much more focussed on compassion. The Mahayana tradition arose in southern India and Sri Lanka and was distributed to the Himalayan region (including Nepal and Tibet) and East Asia. One of its main principles is that the combined beliefs of all the followers will eventually result in salvation for all.

In the Himalayan region, a very specific type of Buddhism developed out of the original Mahayana tradition: **Vajrayana** or Tantric Buddhism. The Vajrayana School emerged around 600AD and is based on more esoteric traditions. Tantric Buddhists use certain techniques to attain enlightenment such as deep meditation and recitation of mantras. One of these mantras is ‘**Om Mani Padme Hum**’, also called the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Buddhism in the Himalayan region, and especially in Tibet, was introduced by **Padmasambhava** or Guru Rinpoche in the 7th century. Padmasambhava is a historic figure, whose life has over time become part of myth and legend. As a historic figure, he was an Indian Saint called upon by the king of Tibet, Songstan Gambo, to assist in the construction of Tibet’s first monastery (Samye, south of Lhasa) and to spread the Buddhist teachings throughout the Tibetan kingdom. Padmasambhava also ensured the translation of the main texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

In the Tibetan region, Buddhism mingled with the older Bon faith as well as with local shamanistic traditions. This way, the Vajrayana school of Buddhism is much more closely linked to ancient spiritual and naturalistic practices and presents a wide range of deities, both benign and wrathful.

The Vajrayana School is sometimes referred to as **Lamaism**. This much more archaic name has become rare, but indicates the importance of the monastic communities (monk = lama) in Tibetan Buddhism.

Within Vajrayana Buddhism, there are four major monastic schools: **Nyingmapa**, **Kagyupa**, **Gelugpa** and **Sakyapa**. (see page 33). All are represented in present day Nepal.

Besides images of the Past, Present and Future Buddha, there are a number of other deities and saints which are often depicted and venerated.

The **Pancha Buddhas**: In Buddhist philosophy the world is made up of 5 cosmic elements: rupa, samjana, vedana, sanskara and vijnana. In the Vajrayana tradition, these elements are represented by the Pancha (five) Buddhas: Amitabha, Akshobhya, Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava. They are also referred to as the Dhyani Buddhas or the 5 Conquerors and are always represented sitting on a lotus with half-closed eyes and their legs crossed, in deep meditation.

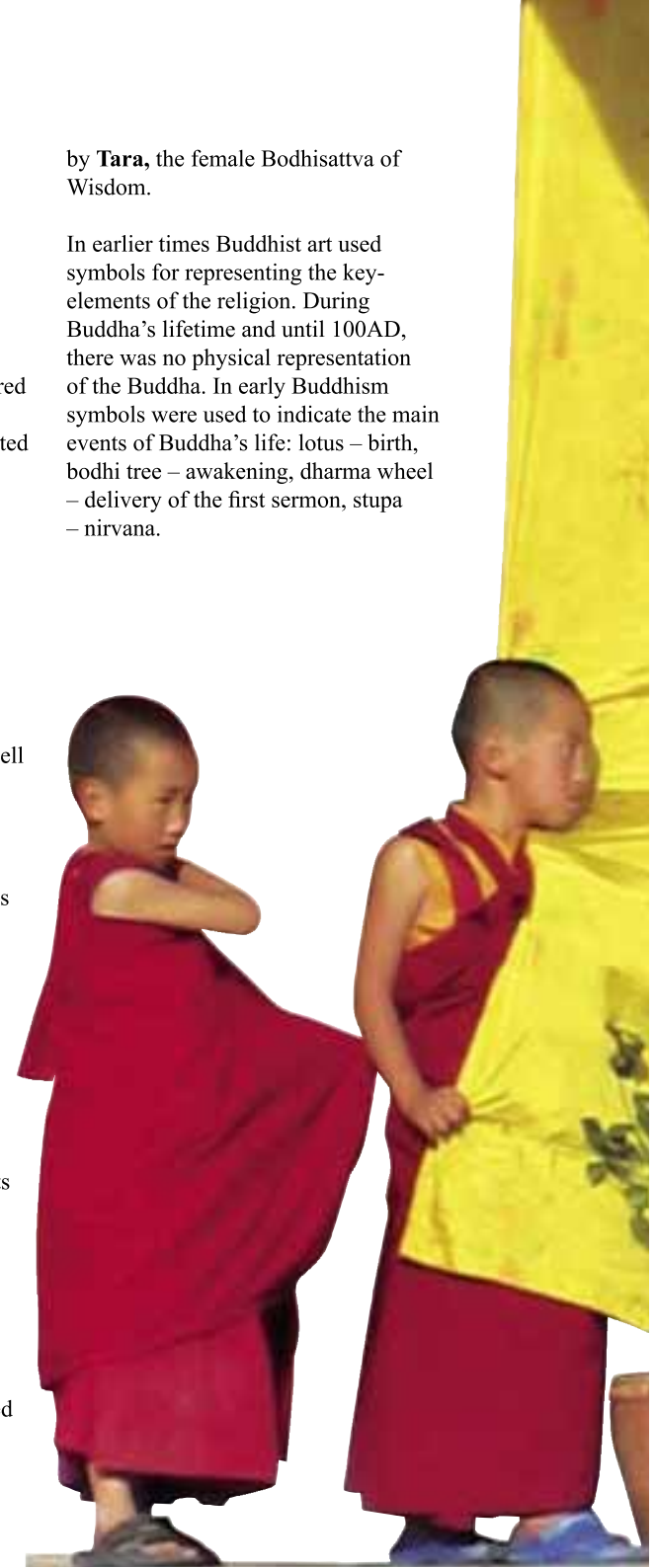
In Nepal, there is an additional 6th Buddha: Vajrasattva. He is the summation of the other Pancha Buddhas and is also referred to as Adi Buddha or Swayambhu. He is represented carrying a vajra or thunderbolt in his right hand and a bell in his left.

A **Bodhisattva** is someone who has achieved enlightenment and decides to remain part of the cycle of rebirths in order to end the suffering of all sentient beings. ‘Bodhi’ means enlightenment and ‘Sattva’ means essence or being. While Buddhas have freed themselves from the life of suffering and the cycle of rebirths to attain nirvana, the Bodhisattvas have chosen to remain in this world to help others to free themselves from worldly attachments and desires.

A group of three Bodhisattvas is often referred to as the Three Protectors, being **Manjushri** (Wisdom), **Avalokiteshvara** (Compassion) and **Vajrapani** (Power). They are often accompanied

by **Tara**, the female Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

In earlier times Buddhist art used symbols for representing the key-elements of the religion. During Buddha’s lifetime and until 100AD, there was no physical representation of the Buddha. In early Buddhism symbols were used to indicate the main events of Buddha’s life: lotus – birth, bodhi tree – awakening, dharma wheel – delivery of the first sermon, stupa – nirvana.





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